



Resourceful Information

Chairman Doc Hastings

Background on the Secure Rural Schools Program

The federal government made a promise over a century ago to actively manage our forests for the benefit of rural schools and communities. Under federal law passed in 1908, the U.S. Forest Service has historically shared 25% of all timber revenues with rural counties containing National Forest land. Since the federal government doesn't pay local taxes, counties depended on this revenue to help fund essential community services such as education and infrastructure.

However, by the late 1990s timber harvests dramatically declined due to federal overregulation and harmful lawsuits, prompting Congress in 2000 to pass the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS). SRS was created to provide "transition payments" over a six year period while Congress worked to increase timber production. Since that time the federal government has failed to oversee a transition into increased timber production, yet has continued to provide money to these counties without ensuring the public land is properly managed.

This lack of active forest management not only deprives counties of revenue to fund schools and roads, but also inhibits job creation and makes our National Forests increasingly susceptible to wildfires and invasive species. As a result, many rural counties are suffering double-digit unemployment with little hope of creating meaningful jobs without access to common sense management of the public lands.

Maintaining the status quo of the current SRS program is not an option. Given our growing debt and deficit, it is becoming increasingly difficult to finance this program that costs several hundred million dollars annually. Furthermore, simply reauthorizing the program does not address the fundamental problem of declining forest management and timber sales, as well as lost job opportunities and increased risk of wildfires.

H.R. 1526, Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act:

H.R. 1526, the *Healthy Forests for Healthy Communities Act*, is a long-term solution to help put hard-working Americans back to work and ensure that these rural counties have a stable source of revenue to help pay for schools and teachers.

The bill requires responsible timber production on at least half of the Forest Service's commercial timber lands – areas that were specifically identified by the Forest Service for timber harvest. 25 percent of the revenue from the timber sales would then be shared with the counties, as required by law since 1908. The bill also allows a short-term extension of Secure Rural School payments to provide funding to counties as the Forest Service transitions back to active management.

By helping to restore active forest management, this bill would create over 68,000 direct American jobs and nearly 140,000 indirect jobs.